Dysentery #8

Henry E. Shore

admitted March 13. 1821.

Dysentery.

I come before you, Gentlemen, as a candidate for a degree of medicine; I bring with me feelings of no ordinary kind; it is natural to all men, when presenting themselves under similar circumstances, before a body so enlightened as yours, to be agitated by the most painful emotions. My embarrassment is considerable, — I am without the benefits of a liberal education and nature has reserved her gifts for some more favourite youth. I throw myself upon your indulgence and hope in your wonted liberality. I have selected for my inaugural dissertation, the subject of Dysentery. — One which has been handled by the most able and sagacious of men, and whose one single argument, would invalidate the very few ideas which I have undertaken to throw together.

It will be perceived that I have rested principally upon the most celebrated Authors.— I have incorporated their views into my Thesis.

The word Dysentery imports a difficulty or a disturbance of the functions of the Intestines. It is termed by the Latins, Difficultas Intestinorum, by some a Tormina, and by others Rheumatismus cum ulcere. Dr Sydenham called it, a fever of its own kind turned inwards upon the bowels. Having gone thus far concerning the definition of the disease of which we are considering, We come now to its more immediate relationship, and first of its,

Causes.

The causes which give rise to a Dysentery are often cold or moisture, succeeding quickly to intense heat or great drought, in consequence of which, the perspiration is checked and a determination made to the intestines. It has been produced by drinking large draughts of cold water, unwholesome food, wearing damp clothes, a change of liveing

from a scant to a luxurious diet, and Dr Mosely observes that he frequently knew it caused by eating immoderately of such fruit, as Pine Apples and Oranges among people newly arrived in the West Indies, and in Paris from drinking the water of the Seine, and from a change of water in many countries. But furthermore, mentions that an Epidemical Dysentery is universally caused by obstructed perspiration, being determined to the intestines, and not confined to cold, hot, wet, or dry seasons, particular food, water, liquors or fruit, but chiefly depending on some secret influence in the atmosphere, or on sudden transitions of the air, and such other causes as expose people to have perspiration hastily stopped. The great master of the healing art Hippocrates, has declared, that long continued dry weather will produce Dysenteries, that Dysenteries may arise from bile and Phlegm falling on the bowels, and there corroding and ulcerating them, that black bile may cause Dysenteries, they, they prove mortal, that a diarrhea may cause a Dysentery, that people past their youth are most obnoxious to Dysenteries, that a Plethora from the loss of a limb by amputation may

cause a Dysentery.

That the Dysentery is sometimes an Epidemical disease, seems to be a point conceded by many; nevertheless as to its contagious nature there are many warm disputants. Dr. Cullen asserts that it is a contagious disease, and by its propagation independent of cold or other exciting causes, becomes epidemic in camps and other places. He is very sceptical, wheather the application of cold, can be attributed to the production of this disease, unless, when the specific contagion has been previously received into the body. Dr. Mosely, on the other hand observes "that in camps and hospitals, those people whose dirty employment subjects them in a particular manner to a depravation of their habits, seldom escape the present epidemic, and this gives rise to the vulgar expression and very incorrect notion of catching the disease, and that others from the slightest deviation from regularity, lose the power by which the body resists diseases and they are also attacked. But, these effects are not to be attributed to infection, for those people, who keeps the vital and animal powers in

uniform confidency, by temperance and calmness of mind. (for fear by lowering the vital energy, subjects the body to disease) nourishing diet, proper clothing and cleanliness, and by keeping a free and regular passage open for all excretions, are proofs against the assaults of foul and pestilential air." We have frequently entered an apartment where three or four persons lay sick of Dysentery; we have set by them through the night, have felt the state of the skin, and examined every stool, without the disease being ever taken.

The Dysentery consists in an inflammation of the mucous membrane of the intestines, generally occurring about the latter part of summer and first of autumn, complicated sometimes with the intermittent and remittent fevers, which are frequent autumnal complaints; and is frequently ushered in by cold shivernings and other marks of fever; though those only of a topical affection appear first, such as violent Tormina, with or without Tenesmus; internal heat, langour and frequent small stools;

soon the fever comes on, with an increase of all the symptoms; in some persons there is a burning heat, from the pharynx to the anus; mucous stools take place, streaked with blood, but sometimes there is more blood than mucus; the natural faces are seldom discharged, and when they do appear, they are usually in the form of small, compact, hard substances, known by the name of Scybala. As the disease advances the griping becomes more painful and indeed all the symptoms which were apparently mild, now assume a nature more obstinate and severe; for the discharges are small in quantity and very frequent, consisting of a bothy mucus streaked with blood, and at other times of a watery humour, like the washings of meat, which is very acrid and highly offensive; the evacuations are sometimes pure blood, and often lumps of compacted mucus are voided. In some instances a mass of matter resembling pus is passed. From the violent efforts which are made, to expel the contents of the intestines, it frequently happens, that a portion of the rectum is forced beyond the verge of the anus, which creates in the course of the disease considerable inconvenience and pain; as

does it bear the Tenesmus, there being a constant desire to go to stool, without being able to discharge any thing except perhaps a little vitiated mucus or a small quantity of blood.

As a more correct history of the disease is offered us by Dr. Hillary in his observations on the changes of the air, and the concomitant Epidemical diseases in the Island of Barbadoes, we beg leave to transcribe it. He says: this disease does not always seize the patients in the same manner, sometimes it seizes them with a diarrhoea which is moderate the first day or two, but it gradually increases in all its symptoms, till it becomes a perfect dysentery with all its symptoms. At other times it seizes them with an oppression and sickness at their stomacks, a gentle rigour with pain in the head and sometimes allover the body, which are soon followed by a fever, with gripeing pain in the bowels and frequent gripeing stools. The sickness at the stomach increases, and is often attended with a retching to vomit or with vomiting, the fever increases, the pulse becomes very quick and generally tense and hard, and

sometimes full, though rarely so full as it is in most other fevers; neither is the external heat of the body usually so great as it is in many other fevers though the internal heat be great; the stools become more frequent, the gripeing pain increases, and the excrement discharged is mixed with much mucus of the guts and considerable quantities of blood and sometimes nothing but blood and mucus are discharged by stool; at other times a bloody sanious or ichor like bloody beef brine, and a tenesmus comes on, with a continual painful needness, or desire of going to stool; all these symptoms continue and increase, if not timely relieved by proper remidies; the fever increases, the pulse is very quick, the thirst and internal heat great, though the external heat, ~~though the internal heat~~ continues to be less, than in most other fevers as all the fluids have so great an afflux towards the bowels, which too often deceives the injudicious or uncautious practitioner. Now the patients strength sinks, he grows delirious, his extreme parts cold, accompanied with cold clammy sweats, his pulse becomes irregular,

unequal, and often intermitt, the stools sometimes run from the patient insensibly, the coldness of the extremities, and the cold sweats increase, and all the other symptoms are worse, the pulse grows very faint, and a mortification seizes the bowels, which soon ends in death.

The Prognostics are unfavourable when there is a violent irritation of the whole primae viae, with great prostration of strength, stranguary, fetid and involuntary discharges, very great degree of tenesmus, a tense abdomen, violent fever or cold clammy sweats, coldness of the extremities, stupor, apthae, hiccup, petechiae, and a weak irregular pulse. On the contrary a remission of fever, a diminution of pain, with a gentle universal diaphoresis, the evacuations becomeing more natural, and less frequent, are favourable appearances.

The Diagnostic symptoms between Dysentery and diarrhea, are the absence of fever and tenesmus in the latter, and the stools in diarrhea are frequent,

with copious discharges of feculent matter without blood.

On dissecting those in whome Dysentery has proved fatal, the internal coats of the intestines, particularly the colon and rectum, are found in a high degree of inflammation, with suppuration, ulceration, contraction &c. The Peritoneum, Omentum, and Mesentery, are likewise an inflammatory appearance.

Believeing Dysentery to be an inflammation of the lower intestines, and more especially of their interior coat; and that their healthy peristaltic motion is interrupted in such way, as to impede the excretion of the natural Fæces, and it being evident that the determination of blood to the part is in undue quantity. The indications of cure which present themselves, seem to be first to reduce inflammation; secondly to procure a free discharge from the bowels, and thirdly to determine the fluids to the surface of the body.

Happily for mankind the Pathology of this

disease is better understood than was formerly, as is manifested by the treatment instituted by the ancients; they being content to combat subordinate symptoms while their more enlightned posterity, amid the clamour of applause, attempted with diligence and zeal a research more fortunate.

Hippocrates advised for the disease in question, warm fomentations to be applied to the belly, when the pains were severe and to give glysters of milk, and when there is fever, to use emollient and unctious glysters often, to discharge the sharp humours. Milk was his general medicine in the dysentery, Asses milk, goats milk, or cows milk; sometimes he gave crude milk, sometimes boiled milk, and sometimes milk with hot stones quenched in it. He admonishes against the propriety of giving milk when there is any pain in the head, and when there is fever and thirst, and when there is a copious discharge of blood, or a bilious purging with an acute fever.

Celsus says among the diseases of the intestines may be reckoned the tenesmus in this disorder the intestines

are exulcerated on the inside, blood flows from them, mixed with faeces which are always liquid, sometimes with a kind of mucous excretions, and sometimes carunclez are discharged with excrements; there is a frequent desire of going to stool with pain in the anus; some inconsiderable discharge is made with the same pain, and the torment becomes more intense, which, however, after some time is alleviated; the patient has very little rest; his sleep is interrupted; he becomes feverish, and after a considerable length of time, either perishes under the inveteracy of the distemper, or escapes with much difficulty and torment. First of all, the patient must have recourse to a vomitive, provoke the excretion of the parts. Then he must drink, fasting, a cup of wine in which the mineral root of a cinquefoil has been added, taking repeated cataplasms to the region of the anus, and to have recourse with a decoction of cinquefoil root, sorrel, fennel, or cut of strong pickle, and use an astringent diet. When the disease is further advanced, he adduces clysters of cremor of barley or mucilaginous, or stags marrow or oil of bitter.

roses, with the raw white of an egg or decoction of linseed or if sleep be wanting, with the yolks of eggs in a decoction of rose-leaves. He says, these things mitigate the pain and are of great benefit when there is a loathing of food. He says, Themison used strong brine in such cases. The food, he mentions, is to be such as gently binds the belly; diuretics he supposes serviceable if they have their proper effect, by diverting the humour another way, otherwise they increase the disease; therefore they are not to be given only to such people as are accustomed to them. His common drink if the patient was feverish, was pure warm water, or water endowed with an astringent quality; or if there is no fever thin austere wines. If, after several days, the patient find no relief from these things, and the disease grows inveterate, he advises the drinking water of a good degree of coldness which he says astringes the ulcers, and lays the foundation for a recovery; but, when the purging is stopped the patient is to return immediately to his warm drinks. When a putrid and fetid sanies is discharged, or pure blood comes away in the stools, the belly is to be well cleansed with glysters of

hydromel, and those other remedies before mentioned. He says an effectual remedy against cancer of the intestines is a lump of minium bruised with a pound of salt; or a glyster of the same with water. If blood be voided in the stools the patient is to eat and drink such things as are of an astringent quality.

Dr Sydenham seemed to have more light concerning the nature of this disease than many of his predecessors; - in speaking of the dysenteries of 1669, 70, 71, 72, he says, "that the dysentery generally comes as the present one did, in the beginning of autumn, and goes off for a time upon the approach of winter, but when a series of years are too much disposed to produce it epidemically, it may seize a few at any other time, and many at the beginning of spring, or perhaps earlier, if warm weather immediately succeed a severe frost terminated by a sudden thaw. In describing the disease, he mentions ulcerations in the mouth mortal. He says, when the disease proves lasting, the intestines at length seem to be affected successively downwards, until it is

drawn to the rectum, and ends in a Tenesmus.
He says, the curative indications are, to make an immediate revulsion of the sharp humours which are deposited by the meseraic arteries in the intestines, by bleeding; and afterwards to cool the remainder, and evacuate them by purgatives. He mentions it is possible that there may be as many species of dysentery, as there are of small-pox; He commenced his treatment by bleeding, gave an opiate the same evening, and the next morning his usual purging potion, which is, Tamarinds, half an ounce; leaves of Sena, two drachms Rhubarb, one drachm and a half; boil them together in a sufficient quantity of water, to leave three ounces of strained liquor, in which dissolve Manna, an ounce, and add syrup of Roses, an ounce. In the afternoon of the day he followed his purge by an opiate. He repeated the purge twice or more, every other day, with the opiate on the intermediate days. Chiefly in aged and phlegmatic persons, after the application of his first remedies, he gave some mild cordials. The common drink which he allowed his patients was milk boiled with three its quantity of water; or

the white decoction made of the root Heartshorn, and the crumb of bread, of each two ounces, boiled in three pints of water to two, and afterwards sweetened with a sufficient quantity of fine sugar; to prevent a loss of spirits he gave for common drink, cold, a liquor made by boiling half a pint of tamarind and a quart of spring water together. The diet was sometimes panada, and sometimes broth made of lean mutton. This method he remarks, exceeded all those he had hitherto experienced in conquering the disease, which generally yielded to the third purge. But if it proved so obstinate as not to give way to this treatment, he gave the former opiate every morning and evening, until it went quite off; or increased the dose to twenty-five drops every eight hours, if the former dose proved too weak to stop the flux. He also ordered a glyster made of half a pint of milk, and an ounce and a half of Venice Treacle to be injected every day; he says this glyster is an admirable remedy in all kinds of looseness. He says he has cured a person of a chronical dysentery by repeated bleedings only, and observes that her blood was like that of pleuritic

persons.

Gleghorn, in the dysentery at Minorca, used Ipecacuanha and Vitrum Antimonii Ceratum, as evacuants. He says, of the latter, he used to give from five to ten grains early in the morning; of the former he directed ten or fifteen grains in powder, to be divided into three doses and to be taken in the forenoon, at the interval of two hours, or an hour and a half between each dose. The most common effect of it, was to procure a thorough evacuation upwards and downwards, during the day, and then throw the patient into a sweat the ensuing night. But he says, he preferred the ipecacuanha, as being certain in its operation, whereas the other sometimes did not produce the intended discharge, at other times occasioned greater commotion than was expected. Nevertheless, he says, he must acknowledge, now and then, in desperate bloody fluxes, he had known the antimonial medicine to be successful, after every thing else had been tried to no purpose. At first he repeated the above mentioned evacuations every other day, for three or four times; and

afterwards at longer intervals, with proper drinks, and a small opiate at nights. But when the dysentery began with horrors, and violent fever, pain &c. he confided principally in the antiphlogistic method, with bleeding plentifully, emollient glysters, fomentations, and diluting drinks: avoiding opium as much as the intolerable torture of the distemper would permit. When the fever was assuaged, he endeavoured to procure a sufficient discharge by stool with mild purgatives, such as whey, weak broth, sweet oily solution of manna, cream of tartar, &c. proceeding by degrees to the most active, till the end proposed was obtained. When other means failed, he gave six or seven grains of calomel, with a grain of opium at night, after the use of the semicupium, and purging aposem made of senna, manna, sal catharticus, the next day. In chronical dysenteries he gave an opiate twice a day while the disease continued.

The celebrated Dr Mosely in his treatise on Tropical diseases, observes, that the inductive considerations are, to bleed when ever it can be done with safety; to cleanse

the primae viae to check the impetus with which the circulation is determined on the intestines, distending and bursting the coats of the distributing branches of the mesenteric arteries; to remove the spasm from the vessels of the surface of the body, and to cause a diversion there — all these must be done immediately, that the revulsion may be effectual. He says, bleeding is of great benefit and usually commenced with it, repeating it should the symptoms authorise. After the bleeding he commonly gave a vomit of Ipecacuanha, not with the intention only of relieving the stomach from a load of acid, poracious, bilious impurities; but rather to induce sweating, by its action on the muscular fibres of the stomach, forcing open the extreme arterial capillaries; and forwarding the circulation to the surface of the body. After the emetic he gave an opiate, then proceeded to open the bowels with an antimonial remedy; for which purpose he selected the Jarnes Powder, it being a medicine admirably calculated to answer the first intentions in this disease. When the purging was done he continued the moisture upon the skin, by repeated doses of Laudanum and antimonial wine; and

should the disease not yield to this course, he repeated the vomits. He also used a solution, which is termed the vitriolic, viz: white vitriol three drachms rock alum one drachms powdered bochinical three grains, to one pint of boiling water, with very great benefit. He gave it at first without alum in sufficient doses to cause evacuations, and afterwards with the alum in nauseating doses, and frequently with opiates at night. This he says, I have found far more efficacious in the dysentery than emetic tartar, ipecacuanha, rhubarb, or salts as evacuants in whatever manner administered or combined. If we were to consult the result of Bullens experience with the medicine we should believe the encomiums lavished on it by Moseley, to be the erroneous determination of a zealous partiality, to render its effects certain Bullen affirms that the dose must be large, and if this is not soon thrown out, it is apt to continue a disagreeable nausea or even vomiting, longer than is necessary. Collecting what I have heard of the medicine in dysentery, it appears in the hands of some to be eminently serviceable, while in others no good

effects could be observed.

That bleeding is sometimes essential at the commencement of a dysentery is a point acceded to by many; and that a repetition of the remedy may be necessary is also acknowledged. It reduces the high degree of inflammatory redness, perspiration, and renders the system more susceptible of the impressions of its auxiliaries: in some cases blood must be drawn to a very considerable amount.

After the bleeding with a view to remove any morbid contents of the stomach, as also to determine the blood to the surface of the body, an emetic will be advisable, either accompanied or soon followed by a cathartic. If an emetic be exhibited alone, some think the tartar emetic most suitable; yet there are cases which we believe call loudly for the ipecacuanha. Dr Zimmerman speaks of ipecacuanha as his only emetic; he gave forty grains with the quantity diminished in proportion to the age and other circumstances of the patient; by it he effected his principal indication of cure, which was the quick evacuation of corrupt bilious matter; the emet. was

usually given in a little warm water or chamomile tea, drinking two teacupsfull of the same immediately after and as often as the contents of the stomach were discharged. Stronger emetics he adds, I did not find that for my purpose with mildness I should have done nothing at all. besides it is well known that ipecacuanha does not relax the solids, while it empties the stomach and abdomen; and that it has something in it that makes it preferable to others.

As a cathartic succeed the emetic, Glauber's salts, Epsom salts, or castor oil answers extremely well. Should the bowels be difficult to move by the preceding purgatives I would venture to administer some of more activity; such as calomel and rhubarb, or calomel and jalap, or salts and sena. It has been mentioned that large and repeated doses of calomel in combination with opium has succeeded in effecting an evacuation of the bowels, when other remedies had failed. Dr Zimmerman recommended a purgative of cream of tartar and rhubarb, as a general rule we would advise a continuance of purgative medicines,

untill a thorough evacuation of the alimentary canal is accomplished.

Besides for the purpose of vomiting, the emetic tartar is a medicine which has been resorted to with a view to relax the skin, and keep down arterial action, and in these it has evinced much efficacy, particularly in combination with laudanum and nitre, given in nauseating doses; it acts also as a purgative.

Decidedly superior in our estimation and to fulfil the same indication, is the Ipecacuanha in combination with opium. Administered in small proportions, yet enough to produce nausea; it diminishes the fever, so much distress is mitigated in the bowels, and a gentle moisture succeeds, which disposes to sleep. The practice of a very distinguished teacher, the mention of whose name delicacy forbids, after evacuating sufficiently the stomach and bowels is to begin with giving the medicine very much in the same way as nature's custom in uterine haemorrhage; viz, two grains of ipecacuanha, with half a grain of opium, once in two or three hours. He thinks it very

soon affords relief to the more distressing symptoms and ultimately effects a cure; he further states that, by some practitioners ipecacuanha was thought to be adapted more especially to those cases of the disease, where there are great discharges of blood, amounting almost to hæmorrhage from the bowels. He believes this opinion to be correct from the general powers of the medicine; he believes it also to be useful in every form of dysentery, though remarks that he has employed it, with more advantage, where the pain has been great and the desire to go to stool frequent and ineffectual.

In order to assist the effect of ipecacuanha and opium, it would probably be necessary to apply external heat, such as warm fomentations to the stomach and bowels; which would act not only in assisting to produce sweat, but in subduing those spasmodic affections, which are generally incident to a dysentery. The manner in which it is employed, is by soaking woollen cloths in very warm water and applying them. The warm bath has been used with benefit

and indeed to fulfil the same indication as the preceding application; and is thought to be still better; yet, owing to the inconvenience and difficulty of procuring it at all times, it is generally dispensed with.

By Dr. Dewer, the flannel roller has been thought preferable to fomentations, or the warm bath; his manner of applying it is, by obtaining a wide flannel bandage, which is to be placed around the body, so as to press on the stomach and intestines.

As local remedies blisters, have been recommended by Physicians, differing though, in relation to the part where the application should be made; supposing that blisters, would, when applied to the abdomen, create considerable irritation, it was the custom of some practitioners to apply them to the extremities. Delayed until the force of inflammatory action is abated they are, (when applied to the abdomen) supposed, to be the cause of very little distress while drawing, and sometimes by the ease and comfort which they afford even composes to sleep.

Under certain circumstances we are denied the use of emetic, purgative, or diaphoretic medicines; the irritation of the stomach being so great as to reject whatever is thrown into it. In this dilemma, the administration of large draughts of tepid chamomile tea, followed by an opiate sometimes succeeds: but should the vomiting continue, notwithstanding the application of these remedies; a large blister should be placed over the stomach, and anodine injections given; should the abdomen become hard, tense, swelled, and painful to the touch, fomentations or a blister would be necessary. When the inflammatory symptoms are left, the use of opiates become necessary for the purpose of allaying irritation and procuring sleep.

For the relief of tormina, and tenesmus, and other distressing symptoms, the combination of rhubarb, ipecacuanha, opium, oil of cinnamon and gum arabic has often proved effectual. The cretaceous julep is a remedy also, used after inflammatory symptoms have disappeared.

If a portion of the rectum should be forced beyond the verge of the anus, and become excoriated; a little prepared

lard, or spermaceti ointment, has been found of some efficacy.

From the first appearance of dysentery, and until its termination, mild and mucilaginous drinks should be resorted to; and if fever and inflammation have disappeared, and there is considerable debility advantage has been derived from wine whey and light broths such as chicken or lamb soup, and likewise animal jellies but every thing that is binding or capable of heating ought to be prohibited.